

"TRAINERS NEED TO GET ON TOP OF THE CONCEPT AND THEORY OF COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND TO INCORPORATE THIS SYSTEM OF THOUGHT INTO THEIR PHILOSOPHY OF TRAINING."

GEARING UP FOR THE EIGHTIES

BY MALCOLM S. KNOWLES

Some forecasts about the conditions and requirements that trainers will face in the 1980s can be made with considerable confidence because they are projections of firmly established trends.

One of these, clearly, is a continued shift away from the knowledge and skill-transmission model which we borrowed from traditional schooling toward a competency-development model. It has been clearly demonstrated that increased knowledge or skill does not automatically assure increased ability to perform, especially in complex operations. By the mid-eighties that model will surely have vanished.

What should trainers be doing now to prepare for this development? For one thing, we need to get on top of the concept and theory of *competency* development and incorporate this system of thought into our philosophy of training. Then we need to master the techniques of constructing competency models for the various



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roles we are supposed to help people learn to perform.

The old job-function analysis technique many of us have been using has proved too narrow to be used as a method for determining significant dimensions of job com-

petence, and is being replaced by more rigorous observational, interviewing, direct assessment, and heuristic techniques.

Become Experts In Constructing

We need to become experts in constructing and using criterion-referenced diagnostic instruments and performance-assessment instruments. Finally, we need to learn new ways to design and deliver competency - development learning resources. The resources for our learning these things are just beginning to appear on the scene. The ones I have found most useful are listed at the end of this article.

Another clear trend is the growing body of knowledge we are accumulating regarding the needs, styles and processes of adult learning. We have learned more in the last decade about the stages of development (and, therefore, points of readiness to learn) during the adult years than in all previous history . . . and the volume is accelerating. We now have convincing evidence that adults have a deep psychological need to be self-

directing in their learning, even though they have been conditioned by their previous schooling to take a passive stance toward teachers. And the chances are that by the mid-eighties a substantial percentage of adults will have had enough exposure to self-directed learning in their earlier education to expect it and demand it in their training programs.

What should trainers be doing now to prepare for this development? For one thing, we should be reconceptualizing the role of trainer away from that of prescriber, transmitter and evaluator of learning toward that of facilitator and resource for self-directed learners. This shift requires a new self-concept, a new system of psychic rewards (e.g., deriving more satisfaction from releasing people than from controlling them), and a new set of skills (with greater emphasis on helping skills than on transmitting skills). It also requires that we learn how to help our trainees quickly learn the skills of self-directed learning.

A third requirement we will face in the eighties is that we provide a much more diversified and flexible delivery system for our training programs. The predictable demand that we make learning opportunities available to employees at times, in places, and at paces convenient for them (and for their managers) means that we must learn how to package and make available highly individualized, learning-by-doing, work - based learning experiences. It also means that we must learn new ways to relate our internal learning resources to those of the surrounding community so as to make the resources of the entire community available to our employees in more functional ways.

Build Educative Communities

What should we be doing now to prepare for this development? For one thing, we should be learning all we can about the experiences of the new nontraditional study and external degree programs in the colleges and universities around us, about the educational brokering agencies that are spreading like wildfire across the country,

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and about the communitywide consortiums (such as the community education programs) and other networking systems that are pioneering new delivery systems for adult learning. In fact, we should be taking the leadership in experimenting with new approaches to building "educative communities."

I sense a fourth trend: managers and supervisors seem to be coming to see a larger and larger component of their roles as being concerned with the development, not just the control, of their workers. If this "consciousness-raising" trend continues, I see the role of the training staff as shifting from one of primarily managing the logistics of training activities to one of consulting (and helping) line managers in performing an educative role. We may be coming to the realization that the quality of human growth and development that takes place in a corporation or agency is a function of the educative quality of the total environment of the workplace. If this is so, then the role of the training specialists will become essentially one of environmental engineering.

What should we be doing now to prepare for this development? For one thing, we certainly need to be beefing up our competencies as consultants, and we might well look into what ecological psychologists are finding out about environmental characteristics that facilitate or inhibit learning — such as space arrangements, density, color, diffusion of resources, etc.

Electronic Media Breakthroughs

Other kinds of frontier developments are so embryonic that forecasts about them must be much more tenuous and speculative. Obviously some new breakthroughs are in the offing in the electronic media. No doubt some form of individual multidimensional transactions with data banks is close to realization. Much more complex multimedia systems are in the early stages of development. Some of my academic colleagues are predicting that the most dramatic breakthroughs in the eighties will be in biological aids to learning, perhaps in the form of memory

stimulants, reaction accelerators, synapse fixators, learning pills — and let your imagination go.

All of this does put a special requirement on us trainers, of course, and that is that we keep developing professionally ourselves. The ASTD Professional Development Committee will soon provide us with a good road map when it makes available a new, comprehensive competency model for the role of trainer. (See ASTD Professional Development Committee Report on pages 58-64 in this issue.) But then we need to invent some new learning resources for ourselves. How about experi-

menting with some ASTD learning networks?

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See especially the publications list of the Institute for Competence Assessment, 137 Newbury Street, Boston, Mass. 02116.